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ABSTRACT

This essay uses the interplay of biography and the historical development of society to discuss how one female teacher has experienced learning and teaching throughout her life. It also presents the results of the teacher's exploration of the dialogic, experiential, and participatory (DEP) approach to teaching and learning that she has explored. The essay first examines how the colonized education that the teacher received as a child in Hong Kong and a patriarchal society shaped the ways that she was taught and her later teaching. Following this is an analysis of how the teacher's experience of feminist enlightenment and critical pedagogy contested the hegemonic culture and patriarchal rules of her past and opposed conventional teaching approaches. The DEP approach seemed to be a promising critical feminist pedagogy that offered an alternative to the domesticate mode of teaching, but the teacher has actually found it to be better in theory than in practice. Six issues of DEP implementation are outlined. (Contains 19 references.) (SLD)

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Exploring Critical Feminist Pedagogy: The Dialogic, Experiential, and Participatory (DEP) Approach in Teaching and Learning*

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Exploring Critical Feminist Pedagogy:
The Dialogic, Experiential, and Participatory (DEP) Approach to Teaching and Learning

By Esther Ngan-ling Chow

Throughout the past two decades, there has been continual interest in exploring critical pedagogy in education and feminist pedagogy in women's studies. Paulo Freire's (1970) widely acclaimed book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, advocates critical literacy for conscientization, cultural automony, and political action for the masses. Sharing similar concerns for critique and action, feminist pedagogy places women's standpoint at the center of teaching and analysis. Both streams of thought point out the significance of teaching about life by exploring alternative and innovative ways of teaching and learning.

Goaded by C. Wright Mills' encouragement to apply sociological imagination, the aims of this paper are: (1) to use the interplay of my own biography and the historical development of society to discuss how I have experienced learning and teaching throughout my life and (2) to present the results of my exploration of the dialogic, experiential, and participatory (DEP) approach to teaching and learning. I first examine how colonized education and patriarchy shaped the ways that I, as a racialized and gendered subject of underclass , was taught and subsequently the ways that I have perceived and accomplished teaching. Second, I analyze how my experience of feminist enlightenment and critical pedagogy has contested the hegemonic culture, patriarchal rules, and conventional teaching approaches. In search of a critical feminist pedagogy, finally I offer the major results of my experimentation with the DEP approach to teach students how to research social life.

Colonial Education, Patriarchy, and Perception of Learning/Teaching

Growing up as a girl child in the traditional Chinese society of Hong Kong, at first I accepted my very existence as one of being faceless, nameless, voiceless, accustomed to invisibility, silenced, powerless, and devalued. The credit for my good fortune of receiving any education at all goes to my beloved mother, who herself was deprived of any opportunity for formal education throughout her life. Her misfortune of contributing to the illiteracy statistics in China became a motivating force in her life to contribute differently through me. Thus, in spite of tremendous hardships, she sought opportunities to assure that I would be educated. Her generation paid the awful price for the gain the next ones

harvested. My mother, though now deceased, remains my best role model. Although she suffered most of her life, she inspired in me the spirit and strength of feminism, a term that she neither used nor even knew. Our bonding as women and as mother-daughter set the course for our respective life struggles, though we chose quite different paths of resistance to pursue our destinies. My mother planted the seeds for my learning, teaching, and researching of life and later helped me to transplant them to the North American soil in which they could thrive.

My educational experiences from early childhood through adolescence were highly regimented and disciplined. They fit the "domesticating" rather than the "liberating" mode of learning and teaching insightfully distinguished by Paulo Freire (1970, 1985). Literacy was taught for the sake of knowledge that focused primarily on a prescribed abstract understanding of the world which did not always accord with reality. My experience in marketplace and factory work while I was attending school offered me ample opportunities to observe this disjuncture. Education was an act of transferring textbook knowledge, a blend of traditional and modern ideas, from teachers who commanded absolute authority over students, whose minds were regarded as empty vessels to be filled. Learners were expected to be passively compliant, denied or restricted in self-expression, voice, and creativity. Schools provided formal, rigid classroom settings that seemed to me to imprison student's young minds.

The domesticating mode of teaching often produces a "culture of silence" among the dispossessed and mass ignorance as direct products of situations of economic, social, and political domination and paternalism. The would-be learners are the victims. Instead of encouraging students or the masses to know and respond to the concrete realities of their world, the domesticating mode imparts a false consciousness to learners, a distorted view of reality, enabling the British in Hong Kong, for example, to maintain their racial superiority and exert their political and economic domination over the Chinese there. The colonized education system conspired to place a higher premium on the English language and instruction in it; in fact, English was the only officially recognized language until the early 1970s. This policy privileged not only the British governance, but also the urban Chinese elites (mainly upper-class males) and their offspring, who possessed the highest English language proficiency, enabling them to serve as middlepersons (or middlemen) to advance the colonizer's interests in capitalist expansion in East Asia. The majority Chinese, who comprised slightly more than 98% of the population of Hong Kong, were largely marginalized, their indigenous culture was ostensibly devaluated, and their voice was greatly subverted.

Throughout my schooling, there was no free compulsory education at any grade level (although that did change later). Schools emphasizing English instruction were more expensive and thus less affordable than those offering primarily Chinese instruction. Under British rule, Chinese parents had to work diligently for family survival, earning wages out of which they had to squeeze the resources somehow to pay for their children's schooling. Since Chinese culture placed high importance on both education and achievement, parents willingly sacrificed toward these ends. The costly education imposed by a racist and class-biased educational policy was compounded by a patriarchal ideology that prompted parents to give sons a higher priority than girls for schooling. Uniform examinations given at different grade levels from primary school to college were used as mechanisms of control to weed out seemingly incompetent students at the onset of the educational process, thus depriving millions of students of opportunities to grow intellectually and mature academically at their own pace and on their own terms.

Acting "in loco parentis," teachers had omnipotent power to exercise mind control through persuasion, coercion, and even physical punishment, using a top-down approach to instill values, to pass on knowledge, and to train in basic skills. Defiance of authority was a sinful act that very few dared to try; critically questioning what was taught was unthinkable. Passive learning was further reinforced by requiring memorization to lay a basic educational foundation. However, what had to be memorized was mostly devoid of meaning for students; it did not correspond with the social reality they knew outside the classroom./1 The teaching and learning methods functioned well only to enable diligent students to survive the school system and consequently to pass the uniform examinations imposed by the British in order to get the credentials to increase their life chances in the labor market.

Did this education system nevertheless liberate young women like me in Hong Kong? My answer is that it was a mixed blessing in the regard. There is no doubt in my mind that my schooling served as a vehicle of social mobility to get me out of poverty, but only in a very limited way did it empower me or liberate me from my state of invisibility, powerlessness, and subjugation. My state of being was epitomized for me when the college dean told me bluntly upon graduation that, "Everything being equal, men are more qualified than women, and besides they have a higher priority to get any jobs because they will be the breadwinners of their families." Educated college women thus remained devaluated, silenced, and powerless, with only limited opportunities and life options to improve their lots. For these reasons, I made a transoceanic flight from the repressive circumstances I found so denigrating and dehumanizing to bear, hoping to find a better life in the U.S.

American Education, Feminist Enlightenment, and Critical Pedagogy

In the mid-1960s, what I experienced educationally in my graduate school in the U.S. was a modified version of the domesticating mode of learning and teaching, although with greater freedom than before to question and to explore subject matters areas in sociology and across disciplines. The emphases remained on abstract knowledge, the objectivity of truth, and the positivist approach to empirical research. The curriculum placed higher value and priority on pure over applied science, on theory over method, on content over process of knowing, and on credentialism over lived experience. The dual roles of students as passive learners and teachers as omniscient purveyors of knowledge formed the implicit ruling relationship in the intellectual process. Students were still treated as empty vessels to be filled to the brim rather than as buds with their own potentials that needed nurturing to unfold and develop. I was well trained primarily in quantitative methodology following the natural science model of positivist thinking and empiricism, which treated women or gender as one variable in statistical analysis. This modified domesticating mode shaped my process of acquiring knowledge credentials, a professionally certified identity, and an unreflexive subjectivity. I must confess that this mode of learning indoctrinated my ways in turn of teaching and research for nearly a decade. I had difficulty letting go of my heavy teaching baggage. While it weighed me down, to some extent, it overpowered the students whom I tried so hard to connect with and teach. All involved, the teachers and the learners, the researchers and the researched, were entrapped in a cultural of one-way communication and top-down power, longing for emancipatory possibilities.

Two major liberating forces, feminist scholarship and critical pedagogy, stemmed from contesting this institutional discourse and have illuminated my lifelong process of learning/teaching. The second-wave feminist movement that swept academic campuses like a tidal surge in the mid-1960s began to challenge conventional knowledge about women, culture, and social institutions and to protest that knowledge was distorted by the exclusion of women from theory, research, and praxis. Historically, Luke and Gore (1992) think that critical pedagogy in the 1980s could be seen to constitute a "third-wave" new sociology of education with new projects emphasizing liberation, raised consciousness, agency, and equality. Fundamental to feminist epistemology is that knowledge is socially constructed and must be analyzed in the context of the social relations in which it is produced. The advocacy of standpoint theories and situated knowledge became central in feminist pedagogic discourses (Smith 1987,

Hartsock 1987, Haraway 1988). Using standpoint theory, Dorothy Smith (1987 and 1990) argued that sociological research and theory must situate women as social actors within their everyday world as problematic and place their standpoint as the central focus of theoretical analysis, for women are knowers from whom researchers derive knowledge. Sociological analysis must begin with the everyday life experience of social actors as situated in particular social relationships between the researcher and the researched or between the learner and the teacher and must examine beyond these relationships by discovering the social and institutional contexts of their respective lived experiences.

In teaching women/gender-related courses and research methods, I took the affirmative steps of incorporating women's perspectives and the experiential approach in designing syllabi, in developing curricula, and in experimenting with methods of active learning inside and outside of the classroom. To study different forms of social inequality, for example, I first assigned students to volunteer at least one half to one full day at community service agencies such as soup kitchens, houses/centers for the homeless, women's shelters, and rape crisis centers, where they were to do field observation. In a written assignment, they were then asked to analyze their observations and field experiences and to compare these with what they had learned about theories, concepts, and analyses of social inequality in assigned readings, lectures, and class discussion. Through such efforts at curriculum transformation, the objectivity of research was questioned with skepticism, alternative ways of teaching and learning were explored, and knowledge acquisition was made relevant and meaningful, illuminating students' experience of the social reality of which they had been a part.

By the late 1970s, I had become critical of the omission of the perspective of women of color from Western-, white-, middle-class dominated feminist scholarship and pedagogy. I had begun to emphasize the importance of and the ways in which the perspective of women of color could be incorporated into the study and teaching of women/gender-related courses in sociology and to examine systematically and substantively how various dimensions of gender are compounded by the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, class, and culture (Chow 1985). Social diversity and multiculturalism emerged as critical issues when the needs and interests of learners and teachers of diverse backgrounds were taken into consideration in the educational process. Promotion of inclusive knowledge and curriculum transformation has deepened my understanding of the complexity of these issues, which reach beyond national and socio-cultural boundaries to include also the lives of women and others worldwide regardless of nationality, age, sexual orientation, or physical ability.

The second major force that has offered me liberating revelations is critical pedagogy, which is founded on critical theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, on Gramsci's (1971) concepts of hegemony and hegemonic subjects and practices, on Paulo Freire's inspirational work The Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) regarding critical theories and practices in education, and on Giroux's (1983) emancipatory rationality and citizenship education. Reading of Paulo Freire on the critical pedagogy of conscientization, in particular, has steered me to appreciate the meaningfulness of teaching critical literacy as a prerequisite for consciousness and to explore the liberating mode of teaching. As profoundly influential as these male authors of critical theories in education have been, they share the weaknesses of not placing much emphasis on women learners' interests or on women's critiques and actions in public and private life (Luke 1992). These weaknesses create an opportunity, however, to rethink critical feminist pedagogy.

The Dialogic, Experiential, and Participatory Approach to Teaching

Central to the integration of feminist thinking and critical pedagogy in my teaching of sociology are three major concerns relating to knowledge production, curriculum transformation, and the learning and teaching process. The first concern is for the relevance and meaning of sociology and the ways in which sociological knowledge is produced and transmitted. How do we consider the gaps as well as the linkages between the subject matters that we research and teach on the one hand and the life experiences of those from whom we derive our knowledge and understanding on the other (whether they are research subjects or students as learners)? How do we make connections between abstract theory and research technicality and between knowledge and life experience?

The second concern is to understand social diversity in ways that reflect how social actors' locations, consciousness, and sources of knowledge shape their thinking, subjectivity, meanings they derive, and their relationships in the process of learning and teaching. Critical perspective directs our attention to scholarship on the social construction of differences, domination, and meaning that is based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, sexuality, nationality, culture, and physical characteristics. Thus, transforming curriculum for inclusive situated knowledge necessitates incorporating social actors of diverse social backgrounds and allowing multiple voices. How do we utilize a class as a pool of human resources among whom some have been excluded, marginalized, or characterized as "other" because of

their diverse backgrounds? More specifically, how do we incorporate multiple voices in the goals and objectives of the course? How do we infuse these multiple voices into the course assignments and projects?

The third concern is with the empowerment potential of learning and teaching for theory, research, and praxis. How do we design curricula that invite participation by learners? Can we sociologists empower those we teach and research? These three key concerns emphasize making connections, diversity, interaction, lived experience, and agency as constitutive elements in the production of knowledge, skills, and meaning to achieve critical consciousness and empowerment in the process of learning and teaching.

A central question here is how do I as teacher (and learner as well) incorporate these constitutive, potentially liberating elements into teaching and learning? A teaching method I am devising which I call the "Dialogic, Experiential, and Participatory (DEP)" approach is the direct outcome of my pedagogic exploration and experimentation in teaching about life in several courses that I have taught during the past four years. The educational character of each of these three dimensions is unique, yet they are intricately related to each other and in some cases overlap. My application of this approach was more successful in a focus group training module and a research methods course, from which I draw many examples in the following discussion. I also discuss the key issues and problems that led to less successful attempts in other courses.

The Dialogic Dimension

Rooted in the philosophical traditions of the West, the East, and the Global South, the dialogic approach to education uses group discussion as a means of exploring the ways in which teacher and learner communicate the sources, the content, and the meaning of their knowing and experience as well as act on the problematic nature of everyday life./2 In contrast to the domesticating mode of teaching, the dialogic approach, largely based on the popularized work of Paulo Freire (1985), is a liberating mode seeking a critical consciousness that redefines the purposes, the process, and the outcomes of teaching and leaning and thus alters the roles of teacher and student. Education is regarded as the knowledge to liberate both teacher and learner by providing them with the freedom to observe social phenomena critically and to engage in the process of transforming action. Education's aim is to develop knowledge, concepts, wordings, and discourse to understand the ideological sources of oppression and disempowerment and to develop an agenda for critical agency granting power to speak, to critique, and

to act for emancipatory interests. Language is an effective means not only for basic communication, but also to examine critically the reality, hidden or overt, of the learners' social locations and the structure of their social world. Thus situated knowledge is created, experienced, and acted upon to articulate individuals' understanding and to derive shared meaning as to the things, events, and phenomena surrounding them. The role of teacher becomes that of a facilitator of group discussion who uses the power of dialogue to aid group members in giving voice, sharing viewpoints, and making connections between individual and structural conditions. In this way, the dichotomous roles of teacher and learner became blurred or are even deconstructed and redefined.

Teaching a focus group research training module and a research methods course has offered me ample, valuable opportunities to translate these pedagogic ideas into action. The focus group represents a valuable qualitative approach to collect data through spontaneous discussion and social interaction on a defined topic area with the goal of describing and explaining how people regard their perceptions, ideas, attitudes, feelings, and events (Krueger 1994). Knowledge generates power by constituting people as subjects or participants (Foucault 1972) through language and simultaneous interaction in a group setting. All fourteen graduate students in the focus group training module generally agreed that the class atmosphere fostered a situation in which they had a forum in which to express opinions and experienced empowerment in the learning process.

The dialogic approach to research also recasts the role of the researcher as a facilitator or a moderator and situates learners or research subjects as active participants in ways that lead to empowerment of all parties involved. Language matters! Social interaction enhances understanding by aiding learners or participants to negotiate reality and share meanings. Knowledge is neither possessed nor controlled by the teacher, but comes from the liberating, dialogical speaking of words conveying learners' voices and views. Instead of feeling that power had been taken away from me as a teacher, I myself became a learner, taught and empowered by what the learners brought to the discourse. Treating teachers and learners as knowers in a less hierarchical way, we sought strived to develop more collegial, collaborative, and reciprocal relationships. By suggesting that the class conduct real focus group sessions involving research subjects recruited in the field rather than go through the exercise of conducting mock focus group sessions among the students themselves, I learned valuable lessons about the utilities of this research method and the emancipating potential of teaching. In this way, teaching becomes learning and learning becomes teaching, the two processes converging and illuminating each other.

The Experiential Dimension

In conjunction with the dialogic approach, an invitation to learn brings increased sensitivity and flexibility to the lived experience of group members, especially the disempowered, of diverse backgrounds, to articulate their multiple voices. Using feminist standpoint theories, the experiential dimension stresses the problematization of everyday experience as the focal point in dialogue and as the research question for social inquiry. This dimension, searching meanings from inside out, captures the hermeneutic or interpretive understanding of people's everyday experiences, viewing reality through the lens of the learners or research participants and generating ideas and information through their own voices. Then the linkages of objectivity and lived experience, intersubjective construction of meaning, and identity formation are authenicated and illuminated.

Whose voice? The experiential dimension offers the content and the form of substantive knowledge informed by multiple voices articulated by participants from diverse backgrounds based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, nationality, sexual orientation, and physical capability. Discussion in teacher education has paid more attention to the diversity of students than to that of teachers. The general assumption is that the teacher has more formal authority than the students and the oppressive conditions may also denigrate the teacher are seldom addressed. If s/he is of minority background and interacting with students from dominant groups, this may undermine (or even challenge) her or his authority, to some extent, affect her or his teaching effectiveness and alter classroom dynamics./3

Social diversity and cultural pluralism imply that knowledge is provisional, relative, and open-ended and that there is no finite and unitary truth. Learning is also derived from multiple sites of pedagogic practice, be they inside or outside of the classroom. I use various strategies emphasizing field observation (e.g., of homeless people in shelters, of battered women, and ride-on experience in a police patrol car) as well as written assignments designed to acquire hands-on experience in practicing social research to create an active environment for self-exploration and mutual aid among learners in social research method courses. Many of the assignments encourage or require students to employ a comparative approach to understanding complexity and intersectionality of diversity (e.g., compare a selected gender phenomenon cross-culturally or across race or class boundaries). I sometimes weigh student's ability to complete a research project heavily over or even as replacement for in-class examination.

The focus group offers the versatility of a setting in which social diversity can be explored and

cultural similarities and differences assessed while simultaneously advancing theory and research. My course entitled, "Focus Group in Cross-Cultural Research" attracted a group of students of international and otherwise rather mixed backgrounds to share a variety of ideas, opinions, information, and experiences through multiple lenses. Special attention was paid to the practice of feminist caring and sharing among the participants and to the use of a feminist ethic in selecting and protecting the human subjects of focus group research. An ice-breaker exercise and its attendant introduction of students to each other turned out to be a useful classroom technique for building rapport among learners at the outset of the course. Students were asked to write weekly journals reporting their reflexive thinking regarding how they reacted to lectures, what they read and discussed inside and outside of the classroom, and how they acquired personally evolving experience through learning, dialoging, and interacting. After each focus group session afforded students opportunities to study gender and cross-cultural differences in media impact on society, a debriefing technique was used to allow everyone to take a turn at discussing the results of their observation and contrasting their research experiences.

The Participatory Action Dimension

Participatory action is an invitation to learn by reflexive teaching to promote emancipatory and active learning in democratic settings, whether they be inside or outside of the classroom. An important goal here is to relate theory, research, and praxis to ensure a unity among reason, reflection, and action. In the syllabi of all my research courses, I clearly state that "The course is aimed not only at introducing students to knowledge and methodological know-how for doing social research, but also at helping them develop conceptual, analytical, critical, and creative abilities as they conduct their rudimentary sociological inquiry. The ultimate goal is to train students of sociology to be working sociologists." I have increasingly employed the pedagogic practice of giving only the first half of the syllabus to students on the first day of class and providing them in the next class a final syllabus incorporating student's ideas, interests, and input into the design and development of the course.

My focus group training module epitomized application of the participatory component in the active process of creative learning and teaching. Students were mobilized to engage in and take charge of every stage of the focus group project, from conceptualization to implementation and final report writing. They functioned like nuts and bolts. Without each one's effort to complete her or his own tasks, the whole scheme of things would fall apart.

I exerted concerted effort, though still more would be desirable, into putting the feminist

principles of caring, fairness, and equity into practice to insure gender balance among students with regard to interests, resource allocations, task assignments, rewards, and accomplishments. Aware of women's marginal position in society and the subjugation of their voices in the public sphere, students considered the disadvantage of a mixed-gender group that would have the potential of silencing women participants in group discussion (Tannen 1996). An important decision was made to have one all-women and one all-men group for equal representation in the focus group sessions. Within each group, we also took race, ethnicity, nationality, and cultural backgrounds into account to make another decision concerning whether to recruit a more or less equal number of American and international research participants to study cross-cultural communication. Each group was co-moderated by two students who matched the gender and international backgrounds of its participants.

Striving for a democratic process in which learners played a main part, we emphasized team work, a spirit of cooperation, and community building in the classroom. To achieve this, some basic principles of group dynamics were carefully considered and efficiently carried out. To build group cohesion and solidarity, I also developed a slogan, "TRUE PALS," an acronym for **T**eamwork, **R**espectful of one another, **U**nderstanding, **E**quity, **P**oliteness/Courtesy, **A**wareness/Sensitivity, **L**eadership, and **S**haring. Although the time, energy, and effort invested in participatory mobilization, task coordination, and team building were considerable for both the teacher and learners throughout the course, we all reaped the benefits of active learning, collaborative research, and collective action.

The Pedagogic Ideal vs. Reality

Ideally, the DEP approach with its emanicipatory potential for empowerment sounds like a promising critical feminist pedagogy offering an alternative to the domesticated mode of teaching. In my experience thus far, however, it sounds better in theory than it turns out to be in actual practice. I have encountered mixed results with it in most of the courses that I have recently taught. To some extent, the results are indicative of the dialectical nature of the DEP approach, which has both advantages and disadvantages when used in an academic setting. I have identified the following six key issues to consider if application of the DEP approach is to be desirable and effective.

First, I have found that course characteristics in terms of content, size, level, and requirements affected the input, process, and outcomes of learning and teaching. Generally speaking, I had better

success in courses that were of an informal nature, such as training modules and seminars with a small number of participants. Graduate-level courses with conscientious students motivated by intellectual zeal were usually slightly more successful than undergraduate courses. Upper-division courses tended to fare better than general education courses, which tend to attract many first-year college students who would expect a traditional way of instruction. Required courses elicited students' cooperative efforts more easily than elective ones. Even the same course may not work as well as the next time simply because the composition of the class members changes.

Second, as we all know, bureaucratic institutions of higher education stipulate rules and regulations covering registration for enrollment, scheduling, performance, timetables, late or incomplete grades, grade submission, and teaching evaluation to govern and monitor the time, the place, and the process of teaching and learning. My experience indicates that these mechanisms of control that are in place administratively to oversee and coordinate smooth operations greatly overshadow the force of empowerment. To some extent, these mechanisms are structural constraints that often undermine the liberating mode of teaching. In an absolute sense, there is no discourse that is inherently liberating. If I as a teacher do not feel liberated from institutional constraints, how can I expect students to be emancipated? The leeway I have in which to alter rules is greatly limited in the academic setting./4 The requirement of class attendance, applying only to undergraduate courses in my case, is also subject to debate. For some, demanding class attendance defies the foundational principle of education for freedom to liberate learners. It is, therefore, assumed that students are capable of exercising good judgement in their own interest. Others consider a contractual agreement from which pedagogic relationships can be nurtured and developed. The assumption of entering into such a relationship is that students will participate, exchange dialogue, and share lived experience. What would happen if students hesitated or refused to participate or did so as they pleased in spite of a teacher's efforts at friendly persuasion? Frequent absence is detrimental to the process of group learning, for absent students' contributing input will be greatly missed and they will not be benefitted by group discussion. Students who decide to participate only because it is required may not be motivated to contribute as much as expected. In essence, cooperative learning must involve not just taking knowledge from others, but giving it back to the class as members of an intellectual community of student scholars.

Third, teacher and student both bring to their relationship sets of societal and normative expectations about how each party should socially behave toward the other in their respective role. We

have all been socialized to follow conventional way of learning, and I have been indoctrinated by the domesticating mode of teaching for so long! I find it relatively easy to do straight teaching in the traditional way. I find experimenting with alternative pedagogy taxing, time-consuming, and anxiety-producing. The teaching experimentation involves risks and uncertainties. In the process of pedagogic exploration, a teacher may not adequately convince students of the value and the utility of a nontraditional way of teaching and learning and may not be skillful enough to execute it in the consistent yet flexible manner originally intended. This sometimes may result in uneven teaching performance or even failure that thwarts the enthusiasm of both teacher and learners. In spite of my conscious efforts to radicalize teaching, I, for one, have easily fallen back onto the domesticating mode of instruction as a safety net when things have not worked out well the new way. Habits die hard! For the DEP approach to work, one important prerequisite is to place learners on center stage as partners in the whole process of teaching and learning. Students accustomed to the traditional way of instruction may be either skeptical of or ambivalent about free style and peer teaching, showing uneasiness in or even resistance to exerting effort to adapt to an unconventional way of teaching. An exceptional few grade-conscious students could care less about what the mode of learning and teaching may be so long as they pass or obtain a good grade for the course.

Fourth, the most critical issue is that teacher and student interaction is embedded in power relationships as they are situated in specific social, cultural, and historical contexts that define the social locations of and shape the differences between individuals. These differences are not equally perceived and treated, for they are intricately linked to our locations in the matrix system of domination and subordination that define our social positions in the hierarchical order, affect the social organization of our lives, and elicit varying meanings for us of our lived experience. As long as the systems of domination based on race, class, gender, age, nationality, sexual orientation, and physical ability still exist between teacher and learner and continue to define their relationship. Freire's project to achieve critical literacy, political freedom, cultural autonomy, and liberation from oppressed social political conditions and cultural practices remains an ideal. Even the liberal feminist tradition of applying principles of caring and equity in the classroom sometimes may result in the illusion because of the fact that equality in opportunity does not necessarily produce equality of results, leaving power relations between teacher and student intact and unchallenged.

The emancipatory rationality that augments a liberatory pedagogy is based on the principles of

critique and action (Giroux 1983). Luke (1992, 29-30) points out that,

> Even in the liberal democratic state as it is in liberal theory, critique and action historically have been the prerogatives of men empowered to inscribe and exchange critique and action in the formal public discourse of policy and law, in academic text, cultural (film, TV) text, the editorial page, or the corporate memo. Critique and action in the form of women's protest against inadequate child care, welfare and medical provisions, marital and non-marital rape, abuse, and pornography laws, and against an asymmetrical gendered wage-system remain politically subordinate issues on the public agenda.

By the same token, when racial/ethnic minority or homosexual critique and action are publicized, their issues and discourse are regulated by dominant groups and articulated in different, yet marginalized sites (e.g., unions, grass-root groups, courts, and prisons). The hierarchically based differences are overtly political and crossing boundaries are risky.

Given that it is realistic to acknowledge the particular power imbalance between teacher and learner as inevitable, we need to give further attention to effective strategies for applying the DEP approach. The first strategy is to accept the teacher as one who serves "common human interest by sharing information, promoting open and informed discussion, and maintaining [itself] only through the respect and trust of those who grant the authority" (Burbules 1986, p. 108). The second strategy for decentralizing learning and taking a bottom-up approach, as Ellsworth (1992, p. 98) suggests, is "to make the teacher more like the student by redefining the teacher as learner of the student's reality and knowledge." Special attention needs to be paid to the fact that crossing boundaries in power relationships can be not just liberating but inhibiting, for societal expectations still hold the teacher accountable. Teachers alone cannot undermine their own oppressive power over students, for these oppressive relations are shaped by outside forces beyond one's control (e.g., administrative control, disciplinary support, parental expectations; and public sanction). A feasible alternative is to guard ourselves against the hierarchy and make relationships more power balanced with great sensitivity, understanding, and flexibility. A third strategy is to empower students by giving them the analytical tools and skills they need to make them free to explore on their own on whatever topics are relevant to them and to help them achieve a higher level of awareness of the social institutions and cultural practices that have affected their and other's lives.

A fifth key issue to consider is that giving voice can be a powerful way to break a culture of silence, and yet giving voice is not enough. Learners are equipped with varying ability and willingness to give voice. For example, critical feminist pedagogy places women's standpoint at the center as a

beginning point to involve women as part of the process by which their oppression is examined and challenged. Much sexism has been socialized into women beneath the conscious level where they may not be able or willing to acknowledge its existence. Consciousness raising, generally considered an effective technique for teaching and political action, may enable women to give voice to knowledge that they were not aware was in their possession. As Audre Lorde (1980) points out, self-conscious living, living without silence, is a tool to combat powerlessness and separation from others. Sometimes, the situation requires a crisis or a rupture of normality to bring the conscientization of a problematic everyday world to a recognized level (Mies 1983). Women may internalize their oppression or develop a false consciousness, making them gatekeepers of patriarchy without knowing it. As Gorelick (1996, p.388) points out, "...much of the underlying structure of oppression is hidden, not only by means of ideology but also by means of contradictory daily life..." that obscures the causes of oppression. She (1996, p. 389) thinks that "To some extent these hidden relationships can be discovered (and are discovered) by the oppressed themselves as they begin to interact, collectivize their experience...and start to change their situation."

Language does matter to give voice; however, the voice needs to be heard and what is heard elicit meanings, leading to transformative consciousness and action. In the case of teaching, some learners, including many women of color in particular, may be overpowered by a forceful teacher, find no common ground to share with either the teacher or others, and retreating into a world of silence. Like the oppressed, learners posses the wisdom to know their circumstances but tend to use concepts and words to articulate their world that teachers or researchers fail to comprehend as wisdom. My students and I found that it was not that easy for either the learners or the teacher to be active and reflective listeners in our focus group training. The listening process involves not just what is said and heard, but what this actually means to the interacting parties. Therefore, partnerships between teachers and learners, between researchers and those researched are needed to more fully understand life experience, explanations of that experience, and relationships between the two.

Finally, empowerment, a key concept in critical and feminist pedagogy, needs further thinking. What does empowerment really mean; empowerment to whom and to do what? The general sense of empowerment is that it means sharing power with, giving it to, or distributing it among students. Analyzing the concept of power as "circulating," "exercised," and "existing in action," Foucault (1972) raises questions about the possibilities of empowering, not the giving of power, but the helping of other

to exercise it. Critical of the tendency of discourses in critical and feminist pedagogy to "decontextualize" empowerment, Gore (1992, p. 59) insightfully points out that "...conceiving of power as exercised points immediately to the need for empowerment to be context-specific and related to practices." Empowerment not only involves a self-critical process, embodying the meanings of capacity, internal strength, and potential rather than domination, but entails actual action to transform power as it is exercised in particular sites.

Empowerment embraces transformation of individual, action, and society for both teachers and learners. Ellsworth (1992, p. 99) asks the question of empowerment for what? She includes, "...for 'human betterment,' 'for expanding the range of possible social identities people may become,' and 'making one's self present as part of a moral and political project that links production of meaning to the possibility for human agency, democratic community, and transformative social action'.... As a result, student empowerment...becomes a 'capacity to act effectively'...." to challenge any identifiable social or political position, institution, or group for the promotion of the common good. She assumes that if individuals' (e.g., teachers' or learners') experiences are changed (i.e., by elimination of racism, classism, sexism, ageism, and homophobia), then their lives and social conditions and, hence, civil society will be changed for the better. As Luke (1992, p. 27) puts it,

> if students are given (equal) opportunity to articulate their cultural experiences, and if teachers help students discover how they self-construct cultural meanings and identities within and against the ideological frameworks of mass culture, institutional settings and discourses--then students will have the critical tools with which to act in morally responsible, socially just and political consciousness ways against individual and collective oppression.

Conclusion

At mid-life, I have come to realize that I have been imprisoned by the domesticating mode of teaching and engulfed by a sea of silence for most of my life. My teaching struggle now is a tug--of-war between the domesticating and liberating modes of teaching and learning in which I draw from power from within me and, along with my students, face the challenge of teaching and learning to find a better pedagogy. In this paper, I have discussed my rudimentary experiments with the dialogic, experiential, and participatory (DEP) approach to learning and teaching. This approach remains an ideal that requires further reality testing in its actual and reflective practice in order to become authenticated. We as teachers as well as learners must explore further the complexities of the DEP approach and make it work

better before we can reach any conclusions concerning it effectiveness and emancipatory possibilities. Through our clear, intense sense of commitment to and care for those we try to serve by our investment in trying to liberate teaching and research, we can transform students. As my graduate student, Chad Fleck, observed so clearly in his journal,

> Often on campuses or in journals critics will claim that education in America, and life here in general, has become too fragmented. I see some truth to this claim. However, I think that these critics underestimate the student's role in synthesizing all that s/he learns from many, many fields s/he is exposed to. As Paulo Freire would say, education is not something put into students like money into a bank. I, the learner, play the greatest role in my own education. I have the power to synthesize all the greatest concepts and dreams from the greatest thinkers of all time. A book cannot do this, a computer cannot do this, and a professor cannot do this for me. I will carve my education into the marble mind of myself!

To the extent that students and teachers succeed in this mutual exploration, not only students but teachers as well will find themselves transformed and truly empowered.

ENDNOTES

1. For example, Hong Kong's colonialization by the United Kingdom and the British domination and exploitation there were basically taboo subjects for class discussion.
2. The dialogic approach to education is not at all a new way of teaching but one with international philosophical roots in the work of the Greeks Socrates and Plato, Chinese Confucian teaching and Mao Zedong's "speak-bitterness" technique used in the Communist and cultural revolutions, the expositions of the Russian Mikhail Bahktin on dialogic imagination and the Brazilian Paulo Freire on critical literacy for adult education.
3. After three years of college teaching, I came to realize that my race, gender, working-class origin, nationality (perceived as a foreigner in the U.S.), language accent, and culture constituted six major jeopardies that sometimes worked to my disadvantages in teaching, as reflected in teaching evaluations I received from students and even from some colleagues.
4. For example, I would prefer to do away with the A/F grade and replace it with either the S/U(satisfactory/unsatisfactory) or the P/F (pass/fail) grades for a graduate seminar in which I have worked closely with a group of doctoral students on their dissertation proposals.

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